

service force with him. He had thus at the same time to solve the problems of combat, flight, and convoy protection. His opponent, on the contrary, would have to concern himself exclusively with defeating the Russian fleet.

Rozhdestvenski's preoccupation with maintaining his unreliable weapons had left him little time to work out a tactical plan suitable for his intricate task. His battleships were to fight in column. His cruisers, also in column, would support the battle line or cover the convoy as directed. A purely defensive role was assigned to the destroyers in daytime action and to the heavier ships at night.

The Battle of Tsushima, May 27-28, 1905

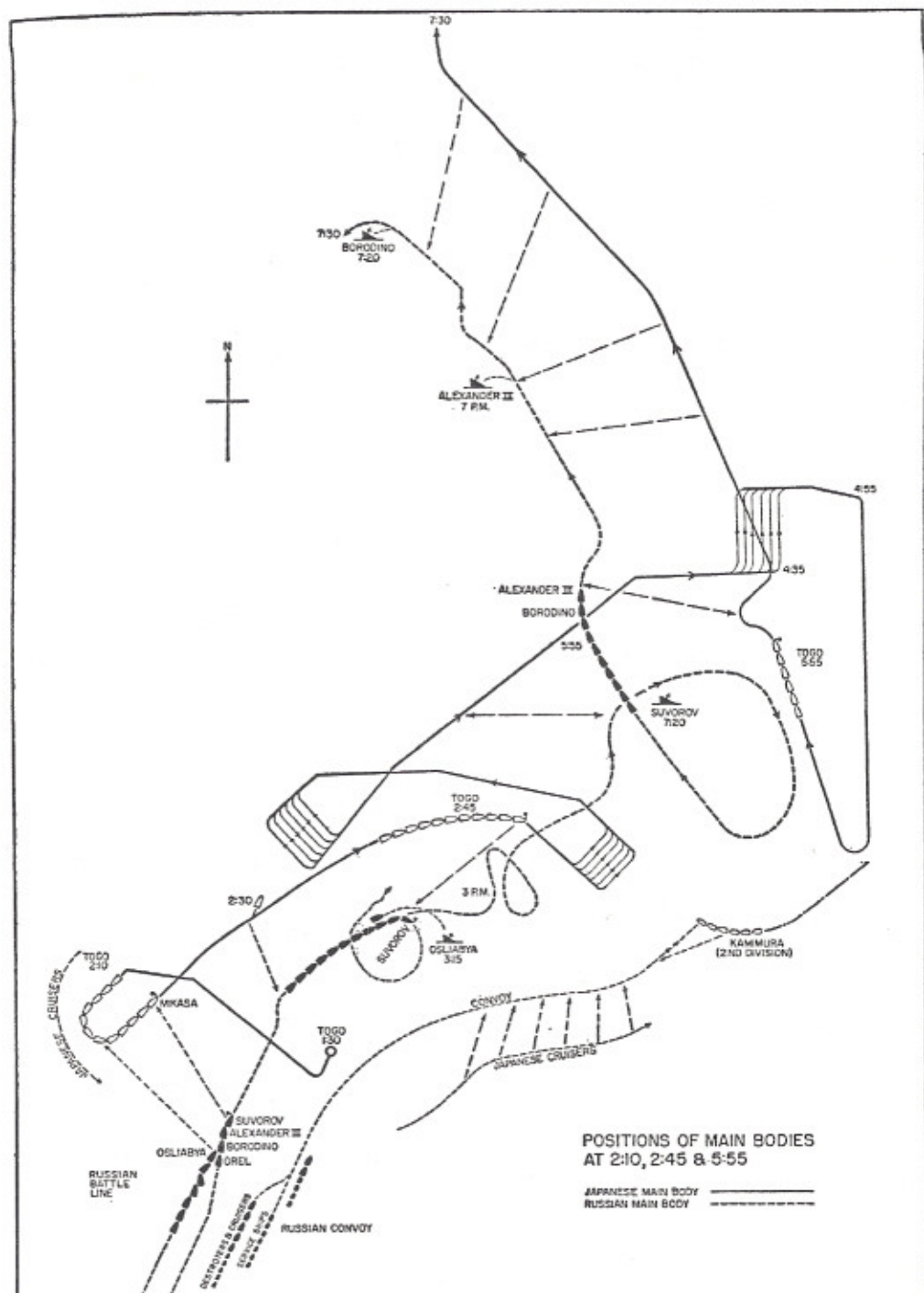
Correctly estimating that the Russians would attempt to transit the Korean Straits, Togo had based his battle line of four battleships and eight heavy cruisers at a secret anchorage near Masan, Korea. His light cruisers and older vessels operated from the Island of Tsushima, maintaining a constant patrol. Fifty miles to the southwest, a line of converted merchantmen covered the outer approaches. One of these at 4:45 AM on May 27 made contact with Rozhdestvenski's fleet and flashed the word by radio. Shortly after dawn the Japanese light cruiser divisions were shadowing the Russians.

At 6:30 the Japanese battle line steamed out of Masan anchorage. Togo, leading the First Division in the *Mikasa*, closely followed by Kamimura, leading the Second Division, headed east to intercept the Baltic squadron abreast of Tsushima. As in the Battle of August 10, Togo's battle line would move like an articulated barrier back and forth across the Russians' line of advance in order to turn them back. Light cruiser divisions were to engage the Russian cruisers and auxiliaries. At nightfall all gunnery ships would hand over the enemy to the destroyer flotillas and withdraw to the north to give them a clear field. At dawn the next day, the main units would sweep south to re-engage. The pattern would be repeated until the Russian fleet was annihilated.

During the approach to Tsushima, Rozhdestvenski's battle line, three divisions of four ships each, including eight battleships, was in single column ahead and to port of his service ships and their cruiser-destroyer escort. The whole squadron was held down to ten knots by the auxiliaries and by Nebogatov's obsolescent warships in the rear division of the battle line. At 1 PM Rozhdestvenski, desiring to change to a line-abreast approach formation, led the way—column right and then ships left—with his First Division, battleships *Suvorov* (fleet flag), *Borodino*, *Alexander III*, and *Orel*. But noting that his maneuver was observed by Japanese cruisers, which appeared to the northwest, he canceled the order for line abreast and signaled the *Borodino*, the *Alexander III*, and the *Orel* to fall in behind the *Suvorov*, thus re-forming his First Division in column, but off to starboard of the others.

Meanwhile, Togo had led his twelve-ship battle line from west to east, across the Russians' line of advance and then headed southwest in order to attack them from the east. On this course he at length made out his own cruisers shadowing the Russian columns, which soon came into view eight miles away. Having rounded Tsushima, they were now on a more northerly heading, course 023 for Vladivostok, than that last reported to Togo. This new course called for an attack on the Russian left flank in order to turn them away. Rozhdestvenski himself made this feasible by hastening to return his First Division to the head of his battle line. Taking all this in, Togo a little after 1:30 PM changed to course northwest and led his line back across the head of the oncoming enemy divisions, then still out of range at 15,000 yards. He then turned his line left in succession and came down on the port bow of the Russians and on an opposite course. At this moment signal flags started up from the *Mikasa's* bridge, reading: "The fate of the Empire depends on the issue of this battle; let every man do his utmost."

A passing exchange of broadsides would have been indecisive. For Togo to continue on course southwest moreover would risk letting Rozhdestvenski get past him—as Vitgeft had got past the preceding August—and turn the battle into another chase. Togo, determined that nothing of the sort should happen again,



BATTLE OF TSUSHIMA, MAY 27, 1905

and desiring to close the range, made a move so audacious that it caused officers in both fleets to gasp in surprise. Signaling "Follow me," he turned toward the enemy and continued around to an opposite course. He reversed his ships in succession rather than together in order to retain his position in the van. In so doing he formed his column into a U, with the leading ships masking the fire of those following and all ships turning in the same water, thereby providing the Russians with a stationary target.

The Russians, still preoccupied with getting back into single column, were not prepared to take full advantage of their grand opportunity. The *Orel*, at the rear of the First Division, was masked by the *Oslabya*, at the head of the Second. To avoid colliding with the *Orel*, the *Oslabya* had backed down, throwing the following ships into confusion. Nevertheless, when the *Mikasa* and one more Japanese ship had made their turns, Rozhdestvenski ordered "Open fire," and shells from such Russian ships as could bear began creeping toward both the Japanese flagship and the Japanese knuckle. Togo had gambled that Russian gunners would not be skillful enough to make his maneuver too hazardous, and the outcome proved him right. The Japanese line completed its perilous 16-minute countermarch with only minor damage. Rozhdestvenski's chance for escape or victory had now passed.

The Japanese pressed toward the Russian van and released a hail of projectiles that quickly found the range. Steaming at 14 knots, Togo drew ahead and gradually came right in an effort to cross the T of his opponent.⁴ This Rozhdestvenski countered by abandoning his northerly course and giving way to the right. But though this move placed the Japanese on the outer arc of concentric circles, they were able to maintain their lead and mass fire on the Russian van, including the

Oslabya, which had been forced out of line to port, overlapping the *Orel*.

The fire of the Russians, though slow and inaccurate, was sufficiently deadly. Their shells, fused for delayed action, penetrated deeply before exploding. But the damage they did was not as immediately obvious as that of the high-explosive Japanese shells, fused for instantaneous action. These shattered the morale of Russian gunners and ignited paint fires, sending up clouds of smoke that drove them from their guns. Even the Japanese occasionally lost their targets, though the yellow Russian funnels stood out like beacons through the pall.

At 2:30 Togo's next-to-rear cruiser was hit above the steering compartment by a 12-inch shell and had to leave the line. Twenty minutes later Rozhdestvenski's flagship *Suvorov* sheered to the right out of control, one funnel and a mast shot away and her upper works a shambles. She circled once and staggered off to the northeast, carrying Rozhdestvenski wounded out of the battle. Exploding shells meanwhile had torn huge holes in the *Oslabya* just above the waterline forward. Incoming seas brought her down by the bow until her side guns were awash. Rapidly flooding through these, she rolled over to port, hung on her beam ends for a few minutes, and at last capsized and plunged with the loss of 600 of her 800 men. This ended the half hour that decided the issue of the battle. What followed was chiefly a mopping-up operation.

The second stage of the battle, beginning about 3 PM, saw the Russian line attempting repeatedly to resume course 023, toward Vladivostok. Each time it was foiled by the Japanese, who used their superior speed to sweep back and forth across its line of advance, forcing the Russians to starboard through two clockwise circles to avoid capping fire. At 4:35, after a half-hour exchange of shells at 7,000 yards, Togo disengaged and ordered his destroyers to make a torpedo attack.

Twenty minutes later, learning that the destroyers were unable to carry out this assignment, Togo and Kamimura hurried south toward gunflashes on the horizon. The Japanese battle line missed the Russian main body in the smoke to westward but soon found itself heading into the battle of the light cruisers, which had been going on indecisively since

⁴ Capping the enemy, or crossing his T, is a tactical maneuver whereby ships in column can attain maximum concentration of fire against opponents who are also in column. The attacker, in crossing ahead at 90 degrees, more or less, to the enemy's line of advance, is able to bring full broadsides to bear, massing his fire on the head of the enemy column, while his opponent finds his own after guns either "closed out" or able to bear only on the extremities of the attacker's column at relative long range.

noon. Kamimura stayed to lend support in this area, while Togo headed northwest after bigger game.

The third phase of the battle began at 5:55 as the north-steaming Japanese First Division again sighted Russian battleships bearing north-west on their port bows. Togo turned in four points to close the range quickly before dark. But the Russians were still full of fight, and he now found himself running into heavy fire with all the advantages on the other side, since the sun was setting directly in the eyes of his pointers and his six ships were engaging ten. A quick turn to the right opened the range another 2,000 yards, and Togo came to a parallel course. As the light gradually shifted in the Japanese favor, silhouetting the Russians against the afterglow, Togo's vessels massed a deadly, accurate fire on the *Alexander III*, at

the head of the line. Fifteen minutes later, burning fiercely, her bows nearly blown off, she turned left out of line, capsized, and went down. The Japanese had already shifted fire to the new van ship *Borodino*. As darkness came on she caught fire, thus presenting an easy target to the Japanese range finders. At 7:20 two of her magazines exploded, whereupon she capsized, floated bottom upward a few minutes, and then sank.

The loss of the *Borodino* broke up the Russian column. Signaling "Follow me," Nebogatov in the *Nicholas I*, led a disorganized mass of ships to the southwest. The Japanese battleships and cruisers now left the area according to plan and steamed north at 14 knots toward the morning rendezvous near Ullung Island. With their departure the battle entered a fourth phase: a series of scattered and fiercely contested night torpedo actions.

The Japanese destroyers had already sunk the heavily damaged *Suvorov*, but not before a Russian destroyer had come alongside and removed *Rozhdestvenski*, who was insensible from head wounds. In the darkness the Japanese torpedo craft, 21 destroyers and 37 torpedo boats, now closed in on the bewildered Russian fleet from all directions, sinking two battleships and so damaging two cruisers that they were scuttled to avoid capture.

At dawn on May 28, 140 miles north of the previous day's battle area, Togo's staff were sweeping their glasses over an empty horizon when a light cruiser division 60 miles to the south reported Russian ships. The Japanese battle divisions steered toward the contact and at 9:30 sighted battleships *Orel* and *Nicholas I*, two coast defense ironclads, and a cruiser. Shots fired from beyond the Russian range brought no response save the hoist of a table cloth in lieu of a white flag on the *Nicholas*. The Russian cruiser made off at high speed and escaped.

The surrender had been made on the order of Admiral Nebogatov, on whom the Russian command had devolved. As he left the deck of his flagship to hand his sword to Togo, he turned to the crew and said, "I am an old man, over 60, and I do not care whether I live or die. I shall be shot for this, but that does not matter. You however are young, and you will be called upon some day to restore



FLEET TRACKS, BATTLE OF TSUSHIMA

the glory and the lost honor of the Russian navy. On these ships are 2,400 men whose lives are more important than mine."⁵

Of the separated Russian units, a coast defense ironclad of the battle line was heavily hit and scuttled; two cruisers were driven ashore; four destroyers and four auxiliaries were sunk; two destroyers, including the *Bedovyi* with Rozhdestvenski aboard, were captured; and three cruisers, three auxiliaries, and a destroyer reached neutral ports, where they were interned. In the course of the battle, eight of the twelve Russian armored vessels, including five battleships, had been sunk. Of the 53 ships that had left the Baltic, a cruiser and two destroyers reached Vladivostok.

The Battle of Tsushima was decisive in every sense. Russia could no longer hope for victory on land because internal revolt prevented her from further reinforcing her Far Eastern armies. When the defeat at sea dashed her final hopes, she welcomed the mediation of United States President Theodore Roosevelt. At the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, peace conference, her delegates did not do badly. They obtained a much-needed treaty of peace at the cost of Port Arthur and southern Sakhalin, both ceded to Japan. The mediators rejected a Japanese demand for cash indemnity on the ground that the Russian army, though defeated, withdrew intact and was still in the field.

Had Togo lost the battle, his nation would have experienced one of the greatest disasters in history. The Japanese army would have been isolated in Manchuria and its supply lines severed. Russia would undoubtedly have imposed heavy terms that would have made her the paramount power in the Far East, if not potentially the world's greatest power.

From the naval point of view the battle was highly significant. The value of heavy armor and the need for heavy guns were strikingly demonstrated. The Japanese enjoyed a great advantage through having in their battle line only swift, homogeneous ships with uniform tactical characteristics. The torpedo performed disappointingly. Togo's tactics, generally skillful, appeared brilliant because the Russians fought for the most part without leadership, and

⁵ Frank Thiess, *The Voyage of Forgotten Men* (Indianapolis, 1937), 367.

the Japanese retained the initiative throughout. Kamimura, like Collingwood at Trafalgar, was given a large measure of initiative, which he used effectively. This further confirmed many officers, particularly in the Japanese navy, in their opinion that much was to be gained by operating in semi-independent divisions.

As for strategy, the lessons of the war have nowhere been more trenchantly summarized than in a letter of March 3, 1909 that President Roosevelt wrote to his successor, William Howard Taft, at the urgent request of Mahan:

Dear Will: One closing legacy. Under no circumstances divide the battleship fleet between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans prior to the finishing of the Panama Canal. . . . It is nearly four years since the close of the Russian-Japanese War. There were various factors that brought about Russia's defeat; but the most important by all odds was her having divided her fleet between the Baltic and the Pacific, and, furthermore, splitting up her Pacific fleet into three utterly unequal divisions. The entire Japanese force was always used to smash some fraction of the Russian force.

Summary

Among the established and rising sea powers of the early 20th century, Japan was an anomaly in that she completely skipped the Age of Sail. The defeated fleets of Hideyoshi in the late 16th century were composed mostly of galleys. The victorious fleets of Ito in the Battle of the Yalu in 1894 and of Togo in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 were composed of steam ships of the most advanced design. Between these two periods the Japanese, deliberately isolating themselves, did without a national navy until resurgent Western imperialism, forced them again to look to their seaward defenses.

With remarkable astuteness Japan's new naval leaders not only assimilated the lessons of three centuries of sea warfare in the West, but actually outstripped many Western thinkers in developing naval weapons and strategic and tactical concepts.

In strategy, the Japanese showed themselves masters of concentration, particularly with regard to defeating the enemy in fractions. In the Sino-Japanese War, they brought their

main force against one of the Chinese provincial squadrons and defeated it before the others were committed. In the Russo-Japanese War, they used their interior position to neutralize successively the three segments of Russia's Far East fleet—at Port Arthur, at Inchon, and at Vladivostok. Then, conserving their ships and practicing continually at gunfire and maneuver, they were prepared with the same naval forces to defeat the Russian Baltic squadron when it arrived.

In tactics, the Japanese early perceived the paramount value of the column and of broadside fire. Using speed and maneuver, they generally succeeded in breaking up enemy formations and bringing a preponderance of fire against successive fractions of the enemy fleet.

In accordance with the principle triumphantly demonstrated by Nelson at Trafalgar, they operated in semi-independent divisions in order to attain great flexibility in battle and to permit part of the fleet to proceed at any time by the shortest line to the point where it was most needed.

As a result of her victories over China and Russia, Japan in the early 20th century emerged as a first-class naval power—a power with which the acknowledged Mistress of the Seas did not disdain to conclude an alliance. But Japan, regarding herself as robbed by the West of the fruits of her victories, continued to strengthen her fleet against the day when opportunity would enable her to assert her supremacy in the Far East.